



TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION **18th Newsletter - Autumn (November) 08**

My apologies for the very late issue of this final newsletter – there are numerous reasons but I won't bore you with the details ☺ Whilst I'm typing the garden still has a covering of snow from yesterday's sudden downfall and it's come as a bit of a shock to the system after the recent 'Indian summer' we've been enjoying during the earlier part of the month. Together with the sharp frosts it might also have put pay to my bean seeds which are still hanging in pods on the canes ☺ (*issue now a week later!!*)

TRING ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY 8 NOVEMBER – CHURCH SQUARE, TRING – 08.30 – 1PM

Our final fund-raising event for this year and I think we could be struggling for items to sell – certainly produce won't be in abundance but we would appreciate any surplus potatoes/ apples/ leeks /greens etc that you might be able to spare.

As my tomatoes refused to ripen this year, I made my first attempt at green tomato chutney – which I thought might sell on the stall. Normally I'm not a lover of pickles/chutneys but this one has been a delightful surprise and I've already consumed 2 jars! If you could spare jams/ chutneys/ marmalades etc or bake some cakes/ biscuits/ sweets for us to sell – all donations would be much appreciated. If you need cellophane for wrapping, or would like us to wrap for you, please leave me a message on my mobile 07984 198523 (can't get a signal during the day!)

Other items we will be selling are books/ unused-unwanted toiletries/ house plants/ miscellanea. If you can't deliver to the square on the morning, we can collect any time during the afternoon of Friday 7th November – just leave me a message of your name & preferred time.

It's hoped the first Association 2009 calendar will also be available so if you're passing, do check it out.

AGM – report circulated separately. My sincere thanks to Adam Smith for stepping in as our new Treasurer for the coming year. I am also stepping down as Chairman next September so the future of the association will be determined at the the AGM on Wednesday 30th September 2009.

PHOTOGRAPH COMPETITION 2008

Unfortunately online voting didn't prove as viable as we'd hoped so the committee will be viewing the entries and announcing the winner on our web site. Meanwhile, I have chosen some of my personal favourites to put in the 2009 calendar mentioned above.

MOST IMPROVED ALLOTMENTS 2008 WINNER

It was decided to present this @ the Tring in Transition Launch Day on 8th November so, at the time of going to press, I haven't a clue who has won this year's prize. However, I've asked the Clerk's office to let me know after the presentation & we will post the winner's details on the web – with so many new plots being taken on I

would expect it to have been a difficult one to judge.

KINGS SEED ORDERS

Those received have now been sent off – again my apologies that this is later than usual but it took a while to collate them. We also had the added complication that changing Treasurer meant we had to close our old account & open a new one with new signatories. With the current banking chaos, this is taking longer than usual so I've had to underwrite the amalgamated order with a personal cheque – hope Halifax get it sorted soon!

I'm hoping onions/shallots/seeds will be delivered quite quickly – potatoes will follow next year.

Meanwhile, although the deadline for the Association to gain an extra 'early' discount is 15th November, we can still process orders throughout the year. I've received one late order since submitting the above & will be sending it in next Monday (10th Nov). Anyone who has become a member this season or renewed membership can place an order – just leave me a message on my mobile if you would like to receive a catalogue – ideally it would be nice to have a second amalgamated order rather than submit in dribs & drabs.

I've added a revised membership form at the end of the newsletter for anyone who would like to join/renew. A copy of this should also be on the web site should any new plot holders ask how they can join.

I've been asked by Cllr Roxanne Ransley (Chair of the Council Allotments & Environment Committee) to alert members holders to possible thefts from their plots. With the increase in food prices and growth in unemployment the NSALG have highlighted this is happening on a national scale but Tring Council has also received reports of thefts from both Mortimer Hill

and New Mill allotments. The only report I've received is one of lost prize onions earlier in the year but if anyone experiences theft of fruit/veg please let the Clerk or I know so we can monitor the situation.

I also received an email from Dalefoot Composts re their Wool Compost & Lakeland Gold. They have received a number of enquiries from allotments and are running a special deal for allotment bulk buying – minimum order 60 bags. If any of you are interested in getting together the web site is www.dalefootcomposts.co.uk and email is info@dalefootcomposts.co.uk Cost of Wool and Double Strength Wool compost (30 litre bags) is £3.95+VAT per bag. Lakeland Gold (40 litre bags) is £3.50+VAT per bag & there is a delivery charge of £15. To place an order the phone number is 01931 713281.

Local compost is via Mead & Sons (Wilstone @ £24 per load for Farm manure and £27 per load for mushroom compost or Dunsley Farm on 01442 823357 (best to call Philip after 6pm) I don't have the cost per load but for most half plots, half a load should probably be ample.

Last issue I promised you recipes for Elderflower wine and sloe gin. I received this by email:

Sloe Gin – *“for 25 years I have made 15-25 bottles a year! My simple recipe -*

1. Pick Sloes when slightly soft (mid October onwards??). Freeze.
2. Nick frozen sloes with a sharp knife down one side. Fill a screw top bottle (gin, whisky, wine etc) 1/3 full of sloes.
3. Add sugar using a funnel until the sugar has filled up between the sloes and is just level with the top of the sloes.

4. Add gin. Leave without shaking for a month. Then shake several times over a week to dissolve sugar.
5. Leave minimum total three months - it's a lot better after six months or more.

PS: Make sure you actually pick sloes, not damsons which are a little bigger.

John Allen”

To avoid confusion – wild damsons are much rarer than sloes but hope these help:



Sloes



Damsons – slightly more red & generally larger

The recipe in my book:

Pick your sloes from blackthorn hedges in October or November when they are most ripe – probably after the first frost.

1. Take a litre (2 pint) bottle of gin and remove half of the liquid and store in a separate bottle.
2. Cut or prick the sloes and drop into the half-empty bottle so that they displace the remaining gin to near the top.
3. Add one wine glass of sugar (approx 150g / 5½ oz)

4. All you have to do now is turn or agitate the bottle daily for a week, then weekly for a month or two ... by which time it will be ready to drink (but it is really best kept until the next winter).

Elderberry Wine

This is a more ambitious recipe utilising elderberries. If you are new to winemaking, to find out about some of these lesser known ingredients or methods, either go to a shop that caters to home winemaking, or look them up on the internet.

You will need:

- 3.5 litres (6 pints) water
- 900g (2lb) caster sugar
- 1.35kg (3lb) ripe fresh elderberries
- 2 tsp acid blend
- 1 tsp yeast nutrient
- 1 crushed Campden tablet
- ½ tsp pectic enzyme
- Montrachet wine yeast

1. In a large pan, bring the water to the boil and stir in the sugar until dissolved
2. Meanwhile, was, inspect and destalk the elderberries. Put them in a nylon straining bag, tie it closed and put into a primary fermentation vessel.
3. Wearing sterilised rubber gloves, mash the elderberries and cover with the boiling sugared water. Cover and set aside to cool. When the mixture is lukewarm, add the acid blend, yeast nutrient and then stir in the pectic enzyme. Re-cover the primary and wait another 12 hours, then add the yeast. Cover and stir daily, gently squeezing the bag to extract the flavour from the berries. (Don't forget the gloves or you'll be sorry!) Ferment 14 days, then drip drain the elderberries (don't squeeze).

4. Combine the drippings with the juice and set aside overnight. Rack into a secondary vessel and fit airlock. Put into a cool, dark place to protect from the light. Ferment for two months and rack, top up and refit airlock. Repeat two months later and again, two months after that. Stabilise and wait 10 days.
5. Rack, sweeten to taste and bottle. Store bottles in a dark place for one year. Then enjoy

Adapted from Terry Garey's *'The Joy of Home Winemaking'*

<http://winemaking.jackkeller.net>

MORE FOOD TRIVIA

A precious kitchen staple – **onions** were once so prized they were given as gifts.

Tomatoes are a rich source of antioxidant Vitamin C & lycopene for guarding against cancer. They are best eaten cooked with a little olive oil to aid absorption of the key nutrients.

It helps the body's absorption of iron if **spinach** is eaten with a squeeze of lemon juice.

The **King Edward potato** – originally named the 'Fellside Hero' – was bred in Britain in 1902 and has been a firm favourite ever since.

Red cabbage is supposedly trickier to grow than its green or white counterparts and needs careful tending but the reward is it's an extremely versatile vegetable. You can stir-fry it, grate it raw into salads and coleslaw or even pickle it.

It benefits from long, slow cooking, so try braising it alongside apples, cloves, cranberries and red wine vinegar to make a delicious accompaniment to poultry, pork and game.

How to prepare asparagus: one of the most elegant superfoods. Always choose very firm, bright green, unbruised spears. To prepare hold each spear mid-way down the stem and at the base. Bend this section to snap the stem, leaving the tender spear and removing the tougher base. Trim any wooden bits left.

To cook, simply steam the spears until almost tender or try stir-frying, char-grilling or roasting.

ALLOTMENT RELATED QUOTES:

"Beetroot munching beetles, rocket that won't take off, parsnips with attitude – tending an allotment is enough to send you loopy".

"Please don't tell me that you are saving money by growing your own vegetables. it's madness pure and simple"

"It was, beyond any doubt, the most delicious thing I had ever eaten. Perhaps we would keep the allotment after all"
Extracts from Valentine Low's book 'One Man and his dig'

"There is nothing more magical than planting a tiny seed, some no bigger than a pinhead, in the soil in early spring and then, just a few short months later, seeing that seed transform itself into a 6ft runner bean plant, bearing enough pods to feed a dozen hungry Jacks" – 'extract from 'Get Back to Your Roots' Daily Mail article by Rosie Boycott.

PROTECTING BENEFICIAL INSECTS

As we've all read, bees have had a dreadful time over the last two years & it's been reported that British honey will be in short supply. California lost one third of all their bees through the varroa mite (which attacks bees at every stage of their life cycle) and the almond growers (California being one of the biggest suppliers in the world) had to fly in bees from Europe to pollinate the blossoms.

Because they are the essential pollinators of all plants, it's said that if the bee dies out so does humankind. Monty Don is running a campaign for all gardeners to get involved – but I think to a great extent we already do and as allotments holders we already know it's in our best interests to encourage bees, so many plots have swathes of wild and cultivated flowers to attract the these and other beneficial insects – ensuring our vegetables are pollinated. (I've also noticed a big increase in the amount of borage now growing on Duckmore – I love the flowes ☺)

Growing organically makes a huge difference to all insect survival and leaving a few 'shelters' on your plot for insects to over winter is also a boon. Companion planting is a means of introducing more flowers but meanwhile here are a few ideas of what to add to your gardens and/or allotments to give our bee/insect population a steady supply of nectar throughout spring and summer - when going through your seed order you could maybe add one or two ☺

Top 5 preferred by honey bees (in descending order): musk mallow; common mallow; lesser scabious; cornflower and wild clary. Hollyhocks and evening primrose are also high on the list. Bees love all fruit trees (or any flowering tree), all legumes such as peas, beans, clover and sweet peas; dandelions, blackberries, asters, ivy and willow.

Bees like sunshine, shelter and use familiar flight paths so, in the garden, shrubs & hedges are essential wind breaks/shelters – if you notice the flight path of bees, try not to block it with plants or objects. Bumble bees start earlier than the honey bee, so hellebores and other spring flowers are essential for the queen when she comes out of hibernation – if you want to provide a nest for a queen bumble bee, bury an old clay pot upside down beneath a shrub, hedge or in a bank with the drainage hole

visible. Stuff it full of straw or shredded paper and it will almost certainly be used.

MY PLANNING FOR NEXT YEAR

I think this year has been my worst so far for both harvest and organisation – although I have been distracted by the birth of my first grandson so did not spend as many hours on the plot as normal ☺

My Failures:

I'd read that companion planting strawberries with potatoes would improve crops of both – in my case, I had the worst crop of potatoes & strawberries ever so I won't be repeating this particular recommendation!

I lost out to the birds for almost all my fruit. They pecked out my apples as soon as they'd set; pigeons damaged my currants so much they caused fruit to drop whilst it was still green; and my raspberries didn't crop as much as I'd hoped – although this may have been down to me over pruning last year! I need to put in sturdier supports too and this area definitely needs a lot more TLC in 2009 !!

Due to the late summer rains, I lost the majority of my blackberry crop to mildew ☺

My Successes

After two false starts, the runner beans cropped well but I did over-plant the canes – next year I will be giving them a little more space and put in more canes.

Best investment of the year for me was Chard & perpetual spinach (beet). These crops just came & came again – the more I picked the more I got and there was even enough for the slugs & snails☺. I found the Ruby Chard was attacked less than the white so next year will plant more of this variety. The mature leaf colour was glorious and I harvested sufficient crops from a fairly short row to allow extra donations to my son, neighbours and

colleagues at work. I also tried Borecole – this grew very well and when cooked, reduced very much like spinach but is not as strong tasting as some of the cabbages – another one to add to the seed list & grown again.....

A chance success was a little Alpine strawberry that I bought on our June stall - I'd planted it under one of my blackberries and forgotten about it. However, like the beet above, the more I picked the more strawberries were thrown and, unlike it's senior cousins, it kept producing fruit from June through to September. They may be small but the fruit packs a very tasty punch and was delicious with cream or yoghurt. Needless to say, I've ordered more seeds and will definitely be increasing my stock of this lovely compact and productive plant.

Finally, I discovered a Savoy cabbage in my cauliflower plants last year & so enjoyed eating it, I decided to try and grow some. When I visited the plot in August the plants had grown well but I'd obviously also been visited by white butterflies(these seem to have been over abundant this summer!) ...the leaves were skeletons and heaving with caterpillars gaily munching away at the remainder. Totally despondent, I decided I may as well leave them to it and at least keep them off other vegetables.

However, having munched their way through the outer leaves I assume the caterpillars have since pupated - with their disappearance, the rain & subsequent sunny October, I now have a row of relatively healthy looking Savoy cabbages to look forward to later – just goes to show, nature sometimes has a way of balancing itself without our interference – although there is now danger of possible slug damage!!

WILD FLOWER AREA

Yes I know – time & the weather were against me and I haven't got round to weeding/clearing this area as planned. However, I promise Barbara & Brian it's not forgotten and I will 'do better'. At least there should be lots of seed – albeit quite a lot from the thistles!

EDITORS NOTE

I thought you might enjoy this garden poem submitted by a reader in one of my weekend papers – it made me smile anyway ☺

The Peace of a Garden !!

*A squirrel is eating the peanuts,
A field-mouse is 'scoffing' the seed.
I would put up a notice 'BIRDS ONLY',
If only the wildlife could read.*

*The deer have beheaded the dahlias,
The rabbits have eaten the veg,
A rat has decided to join in the fun
While a horse made a meal of the hedge.*

*The borders should be full of colour
But slugs have demolished each bed,
And a mole is creating the Alps on the lawn
While pigeons are 'stippling' the shed.*

*The bulbs which I carefully planted
Have given the badgers a feast,
While a dog cocked his leg on the roses
(I feel I could strangle the beast!)*

*With snails making lace of the foliage
And 'messages' left by the foxes
I think I'll just move to a second-floor flat
And plant our some nice window boxes.*

By Barbara Charles, Wareham, Dorset

FINALLYas explained in the Summer issue, this will be my final Tring Allotments Newsletter. Future notifications will be simply upcoming events and made via email or on the web site. Those members without access to

either of these electronic methods will be sent hard copies.

I've enjoyed writing the newsletters and would like to take this opportunity of thanking those of you who have sent me notes of encouragement in respect of my

previous copies – hopefully you've found some of the content interesting.

My best wishes for continued success on your allotments and here's to a good Christmas and New Year with a bountiful 2009 on allotments and in the garden ☺

TRING ALLOTMENTS
2008/9 MEMBERSHIP



ASSOCIATION
RENEWAL FORM

Name: _____

Plot # & Site: _____

Please print

Address: _____

Tel: No: _____

Email: _____

Annual Subscription: £2.50* **Cash/ Cheque:** _____

** £2 of this subscription is paid directly to the NSALG in respect of allotment annual membership*

Please post subscriptions to Adam Smith, 10 Grove Gardens, Tring, HP23 4HU

I do/do not wish to receive emails relating to fund-raising or events (delete as appropriate)

Web site – www.tringallotments.org.uk